

Context 4 – Exploring issues of identity and belonging

‘Sometimes we need to accept change in order to grow.’

An individual identity is what shapes us. It is what makes us unique and separates us from the other seven billion people on this planet. However, sometimes in life we encounter certain life experiences that bring physical or emotional change. They may have negative or positive impacts on our identity but play a significant part in shaping who we are. It is through these changes we experience in life that binds us in growing as an individual and as a person, further developing an identity.

Changes may come from physical changes, or changes into belonging to different social groups. For the eventful and tragic story of Sandra Laing, it was both the film ‘Skin’ directed by Anthony Fabian follows the story of Sandra Laing, a South African girl of Afrikan appearance with white parents. Throughout Sandra’s life she experiences fundamental shifts of change, from her physical appearance, to her sense of belonging. When we are born into the world, it is our family who is essentially our first social connection. They provide us with the moral values that become imprinted in our nature. Born into a white family in an apartheid era where it was designed to protect white supremacy and unity, Sandra is taught to hate the colour of her skin from a young age. With her father Abraham’s uphill battle against the South African government on the issue of classification of her skin, Sandra’s strong identity is formed and shaped as a ‘white’ one.

However, as we grow older, we move into different phases of life that bring great change, such as the transition into school. As Sandra moves to boarding school at the age of six she is pushed outside her comfort zone. When first questioned about her physical appearance, Sandra bemusedly replies, ‘I am not black’, As Sandra grows older she realizes that her physical change makes her different, and the target for racism. Her once strong identity of herself and the place where she belonged is slowly dismantled and shattered. However, despite her physical change and the desire to fit into a segmented society, her strong relationship with her mother helps her accept the changes she is faced with and to grow as a person. ‘You cannot help what you are born with, but you can help what you become.’

The decisions we make may also often bring positive and negative change, but play a significant part in shaping who we are and where we belong. When Sandra elopes with a man named Petrus Zwane, she comes to accept that she is black and does not belong with her family. Sandra tells her father, ‘I am not white.’ This has a strong negative impact on her father as the changes to Sandra present a difficult challenge to her father. Appalled and disgusted, Abraham cuts all ties with Sandra and disowns her. After agreeing and believing in apartheid, he lets go of Sandra, only to grow as a person later in life to apologise and talk to his daughter again. As Sandra lives in the outskirts of the black community, the changes in her surroundings help her grow as an individual as she learns to become independent and raise a family, and ultimately grow as an individual.

As we journey through life, there are times where we realize that we do not belong yet we still call the place where we belong ‘home’ and those who live there ‘family’. And when we realize where we should belong, it brings dramatic change and confusion, but also growth. In the book ‘Tarzan of the Apes’, written by Edgar Rice Burroughs and later Disney animation ‘Tarzan’ produced by Chris Buch, follows the story of a jungle man living with gorillas. As Tarzan grows as an individual and realizes his physical change and difference to his ‘family’ he wishes to prove his value and worth to Kuchak, ‘I’ll be the last ape ever.’

However, when we realize our ‘true’ place of belonging and our lost history of family it provides a means to grow as a person. When found with human kind for the first time Tarzan becomes unsure, ‘I am so confused’ and is at a loss for words. When being taught about the rest of the outside world and human civilization it brings great change to Tarzan and leaves him with difficult choices of whether to leave or stay in the jungle with his family. Despite this sudden change of heart or wanting to leave and see the rest of the outside world, Tarzan’s identity is further challenged as he will never forget his ‘mother’, Kala. ‘No matter where I go, you will always be my mother.’ When questioned on his return to his family, Tarzan simply states, ‘I came home.’ With dramatic change, we are able to further grow as a person, strengthening our sense of self-understanding and belonging.

In our own lives we encounter great physical and emotional changes when growing up. As society changes, so do the attitudes, values and morals. As we move into a stage of transition from primary school, to high school and a transition from being a child to a teenager, we encounter great change not only physically but mentally. From being ignorant, arrogant and not so wise men, we become wise, mature and knowledgeable, through the changes of school, the changes of friendship groups and even simply, the changes of interest. Changes throughout our life plays a significant part in helping us grow as an individual.

Accepting the changes in life is all a part of growing up and growing as a person. These changes help not only shape our identity but where we belong. At various times in our lives these change but it is through accepting these changes that we are allowed to grow.

Assessor comments

- A clear and well-developed sense of the prompt.
- Use of texts explores the ideas and is used as a platform for offering insights into prompt and Context.
- It lacks the sophistication of the most successful responses, although the ideas are sound.
- Fluent and shows good control of language.
- This is an upper-range response.

